

ETHIOPIA 2022 HUMAN RIGHTS REPORT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Ethiopia's constitution provides for an ethnic-based federal system of government. Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed's Prosperity Party dominated the 2021 general election, winning more than 96 percent of the 468 seats up for election in the House of Peoples' Representatives, and formed a government. Voting for the 79 remaining seats representing other constituencies, including the entire Tigray Region, remained postponed indefinitely. The elections took place against a backdrop of instability, including interethnic and intercommunal violence, and an electoral process that was not free or fair for all citizens, although observers assessed the result generally reflected the will of most citizens.

National and regional police forces are responsible for law enforcement and maintenance of order, with the Ethiopian National Defense Force sometimes providing internal security support. The Ethiopian Federal Police report to the Prime Minister's Office. The Ethiopian National Defense Force reports to the Ministry of Defense. The regional governments control regional security forces, which generally operate independently from the federal government and in some cases operate as regional defense forces maintaining national borders. Civilian authorities maintained effective control over the security forces. There were reports that members of the security forces committed numerous serious abuses.

On August 24, fighting between the Ethiopian government and Tigray People's Liberation Front regional forces resumed after five months of a humanitarian truce declared on March 24 by the government and reciprocated by the Tigray People's Liberation Front. On November 2, the government and the Tigray People's Liberation Front signed a Cessation of Hostilities Agreement. By year's end humanitarian access to Tigray Region had significantly increased. In addition, a monitoring, verification, and compliance mechanism under the auspices of the African Union had begun preliminary work in accordance with the terms of the

Cessation of Hostilities Agreement. The government did not allow the UN International Commission of Human Rights Experts on Ethiopia access to areas outside Addis Ababa to investigate human rights violations and abuses committed in the conflict. Instead, the government signaled openness to “joint monitoring” by the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission. Meanwhile, political and ethnic tensions continued to lead to violence in other regions, notably Benishangul-Gumuz, Oromia, and Southern Nations, Nationalities, and Peoples’ Region, as well as credible reports of abuses of human rights throughout the year.

Significant human rights issues included credible reports of: unlawful or arbitrary killings, including extrajudicial killings by the government; enforced disappearance by the government; torture and other cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment by the government; harsh and life-threatening prison conditions; arbitrary arrest and detention; political prisoners or detainees; serious abuses in a conflict, including unlawful or widespread civilian harm; unlawful recruitment or use of child soldiers by government forces and militia groups; serious restrictions on freedom of expression, including violence or threats of violence against journalists, unjustified arrests of journalists, censorship, and the existence of criminal libel and slander laws; serious restrictions on internet freedom; interference with the freedom of peaceful assembly; government corruption; lack of investigation of and accountability for gender-based violence including rape and conflict-related sexual violence; trafficking in persons; crimes involving violence or threats of violence targeting members of racial or ethnic minority groups; and existence or use of laws criminalizing same-sex sexual conduct.

The government took limited steps to prosecute officials who committed human rights abuses or were involved in corruption, resulting in impunity for most abuses. The government took some steps toward holding government security forces accountable for abuses.

There were reports of killings of civilians, rape, and other forms of gender-based violence, forced displacement, and looting and destruction of property by the Tigray People's Liberation Front, Amhara regional militias, and other armed groups. These reports were widespread in the context of the conflict in the northern part of the country. Unidentified militants reportedly carried out attacks and killings of civilians in various parts of Benishangul-Gumuz and western Oromia throughout the year. Local militia groups in Afar, Oromia, and Somali Regions reportedly carried out attacks and killings of civilians, displacing thousands as part of long-running regional boundary disputes. The Oromo Liberation Army (also known as "Shene") – an armed separatist group with factions in western, central, and southern Oromia – reportedly killed civilians and government officials in many parts of Oromia, especially in the west.

Section 1. Respect for the Integrity of the Person

a. Arbitrary Deprivation of Life and Other Unlawful or Politically Motivated Killings

There were numerous reports that the government and its representatives committed arbitrary and unlawful killings. Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch (HRW), the UN International Commission of Human Rights Experts on Ethiopia (ICHREE), and the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission (EHRC) reported numerous cases of unlawful or extrajudicial killings in the context of the conflict in Tigray and the northern part of the country (see section 1.g.). The Federal Police Internal Investigative Bureau investigated cases of criminal acts perpetrated by police. The internal unit's decisions regarding penalties against police were confidential.

The Ethiopian National Defense Force (ENDF) had a military police division with a military investigative unit that reported to the military attorney general's office. Military police passed evidence from their investigations to the prosecutors and defense counsels. The ENDF attorney general directed the investigations and

heard the cases in military court.

During the year, a government counterinsurgency campaign against the Oromo Liberation Army (OLA) in Oromia and Benishangul-Gumuz Regions continued with numerous reports of abuse and killings of civilians. In March media reported government security forces burned at least three persons alive in the Guba area of northwestern Benishangul-Gumuz Region. Following the incident, authorities said they would prosecute the individuals responsible but had not announced any accountability measures by year's end. On July 4, HRW reported abuse had continued in western Oromia since November 2021. In June a video circulated that showed government security officials carrying out at least 30 extrajudicial killings of OLA members in December 2021. The government had not held anyone accountable by year's end.

In June Sudan accused Ethiopian security forces of capturing and executing seven Sudanese soldiers and a civilian in the contested border region of al-Fashaga. On June 27, Ethiopia's foreign ministry stated reports had misrepresented the "facts of the incident" and asserted the deaths were a result of a skirmish between Sudanese soldiers, who they said had staged an incursion into Ethiopian territory, and a local militia.

Unidentified groups of militants reportedly carried out attacks and killings of civilians in various parts of Oromia and Benishangul-Gumuz throughout the year. Local militia groups in Afar, Oromia, and Somali Regions reportedly carried out attacks and killings of civilians as part of long-running regional boundary disputes. The OLA reportedly killed civilians and government officials in many parts of Oromia, especially in the west.

b. Disappearance

There were reports of enforced disappearances by or on behalf of government authorities.

During the year, local media reports alleged an increase in enforced disappearances of prominent figures critical of the government, including political commentators, former military officers, investigative journalists, and social media activists. On July 7, the EHRC called on the government to disclose the whereabouts of arrested individuals and to bring their cases to court with credible evidence after the government increased arrests of journalists and activists (see section 2.a.).

On August 4, the lawyer of detained Tigrayan opposition leader Kibrom Berhe told media neither he nor the family of Kibrom knew Kibrom's whereabouts after the court decided to release him on bail July 18.

On July 18, media reported vice chairman of the Finfinnee Renaissance Association Henock Dejene was missing after he reportedly was taken from his home and detained by security forces on July 10. He reportedly missed his scheduled appearance in court July 12, and at the time his family reported his whereabouts were unknown. On August 17 he was released, according to a legal advocacy group.

According to several reports, thousands of ethnic Tigrayans remained detained throughout the year in unknown locations in Western Tigray and elsewhere (see section 1.d.).

c. Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, and Other Related Abuses

Although the constitution prohibits such practices, there were reports that security officials tortured and otherwise abused detainees.

According to HRW, Amnesty International, and numerous media reports, the government engaged in torture in its security operations connected to the armed conflict in the northern part of the country and failed to hold soldiers accused of torture accountable (see section 1.g.).

During an EHRC investigation in prison and detention centers in Oromia, Gambella, and Southern Nations, Nationalities, and Peoples' Region (SNNPR), detainees reported police beat them during arrests and in detention. The EHRC's monitoring teams found evidence of injuries on some detainees who reported police beatings. In addition, EHRC reported government security forces in SNNPR caused physical harm to detainees in Jinka Correction Center, Gazer, and Total police stations and tortured detainees across different regions of the country.

On July 7, the EHRC reported that civilians and detained combatants had been subjected to degrading and inhuman treatment in the context of the northern conflict (see section 1.g.).

Reports of impunity for security forces continued, although some measures were taken to hold them accountable for human rights abuses. Lack of transparency regarding those being charged and tried in courts of law made it difficult to assess the government's accountability efforts. In May 2021 the federal attorney general's office released a summary report of its efforts to ensure accountability regarding violations of national and international law in Tigray. Government investigators examined allegations that members of the ENDF engaged in killing of civilians, rape and other forms of gender-based violence, and looting and destruction of property. Military prosecutors charged 28 soldiers for killing civilians without military necessity, and 25 soldiers for committing acts of sexual violence, including rape. As of August, according to a report of the government's Inter-Ministerial Task Force, the military court had sentenced 25 persons with imprisonment of up to 25 years, including one life sentence, and two acquittals; 33 cases involving rape (16), extrajudicial killings (nine), bodily injury (seven), and assault (one) were still pending trial. At year's end, the military police were also investigating several other cases of alleged conflict-related crimes. Human rights groups criticized the military's accountability efforts for lacking transparency.

Prison and Detention Center Conditions

Prison and pretrial detention center conditions remained harsh and in some cases life threatening. Problems included gross overcrowding and inadequate food, water, sanitation, and medical care. Pretrial detention often occurred in police station detention facilities, where conditions varied widely, and reports noted unhygienic conditions.

Beginning in early November 2021, according to media reports, the government detained thousands of ethnic Tigrayans under its state of emergency, converting warehouses, schools, youth centers, and other makeshift facilities to house the growing detainee population.

The government lifted the state of emergency in February, but reports indicated the use of informal detention centers to keep detainees out of formal legal proceedings for an undefined period continued across many parts of the country. On June 17, *Reuters* reported it had identified at least a dozen locations where some 9,000 Tigrayans were held without trial. The conditions in such facilities were reportedly life threatening (see sections 1.b. and 1.d.). On June 16, HRW reported that since January, Amhara security forces had held hundreds, possibly thousands, of Tigrayans in overcrowded facilities, where detainees have been killed, tortured, and denied adequate food and medical care. Some reportedly starved to death. On December 4, the *Washington Post* reported survivors of a mass killing said prison guards killed scores of detained Tigrayan soldiers in late 2021. The EHRC said it was investigating the claims (see sections 1.a. and 1.g.).

Abusive Physical Conditions: Overcrowding reportedly was common, especially in prison sleeping quarters. The nongovernmental organization (NGO) World Prison Brief estimated the country's prisons held 110,000 persons in March 2020, although they had no estimate of the prison system's capacity. Prison cells were small and cramped. International organizations reported it was common for cells to have small windows that allowed only a little light into estimated 430-square-

foot cells, one of which might hold as many as 38 cellmates. Authorities sometimes reportedly incarcerated juveniles with adults. Prison officials generally separated male and female prisoners, although mixing occurred at some facilities. Authorities did not provide information on deaths in prison.

During the year the EHRC observed prison centers and police stations in Gambella, Addis Ababa, Oromia, Benishangul-Gumuz, and other parts of the country, where it found problems related to hygiene, food supply, access to health and education, and inhuman treatment of prisoners. On August 1, the EHRC released a report based on a review of 126 police stations and 27 correction centers in Oromia that identified increasing trends of security forces holding detainees without charges, beating detainees, and arresting family members in lieu of suspects at large.

Many prisoners reportedly supplemented their food allocation with daily food deliveries from family members or by purchasing food from local vendors. Reports noted officials prevented some prisoners from receiving food from their families, and some families did not know their relatives' locations. Medical care was unreliable in federal prisons and almost nonexistent in regional ones. Medical attention following physical abuse was insufficient in some cases.

Prisoners reportedly had only limited access to potable water, with water shortages causing unhygienic conditions, and most prisons lacking appropriate sanitary facilities. Some prisoners reportedly had serious health problems but received little or no treatment. There were reports prison officials denied some prisoners access to needed medical care and demanded detainees pay per diem for a police escort to hospitals when they sought medical treatment outside prison centers.

The law prohibits detention in any facility other than an official detention center; however, local militias and other formal and informal law enforcement entities reportedly operated an unknown number of unofficial detention centers. During the year several reports implicated the government in increased use of informal

detention centers to keep detainees, including internally displaced persons (IDPs) from Tigray and Tigrayans deported from countries in the Middle East, for an indefinite period in prison-like detention centers.

Most prisons and detention centers lacked adequate handwashing facilities, personal protective equipment, and quarantine areas. As a result, the prison system was vulnerable to the spread of COVID-19.

Administration: There were reports that prisoners were mistreated by prison guards and did not have access to prison administrators or ombudspersons to register their complaints. Legal aid clinics operated in some prisons. At the regional level, these clinics had good working relations with judicial, prison, and other government officials. Prison officials allowed some detainees to submit complaints to judicial authorities without censorship, but courts sometimes declined to hear such complaints.

The law generally provides for visitor access to prisoners. Authorities, however, denied some indicted defendants visits with their lawyers. In some cases, police reportedly did not allow pretrial detainees to have access to visitors, including family members and legal counsel. Prison regulations stipulate lawyers representing persons charged with terrorism offenses may visit only one client per day, and only on Wednesdays and Fridays. Authorities reportedly denied family members' access to persons charged with terrorist activity.

Officials permitted religious observance by prisoners, but this varied by prison and even by section within a prison. There were allegations authorities denied detainees adequate locations in which to pray.

Independent Monitoring: From January to June, the International Committee of the Red Cross visited 21,407 prisoners in 34 places of detention throughout the country as part of its normal activities. The Red Cross and international human rights monitors were denied access to alleged detention facilities in Western Tigray, however, where many thousands of ethnic Tigrayans reportedly remained

detained in life-threatening conditions (see section 1.d.).

Regional authorities allowed government and NGO representatives to meet with prisoners without third parties present. The EHRC monitored federal and regional detention centers, interviewed prison officials and prisoners, and held consultative meetings with authorities on the findings.

During the period from March 4 to 13, the EHRC deployed monitoring teams at 26 police stations in Addis Ababa and six federal prison centers on April 6. In most police stations the EHRC observed, detainees were held in unhygienic and overcrowded rooms. On June 13, the EHRC held a consultative meeting with authorities on the findings, which included reports of police detaining suspects and searching their premises without a court warrant and failing to provide sufficient food and health services in detention centers.

On August 1, EHRC reported it had reviewed 126 police stations and 27 correction centers in Oromia Region and held a follow-up consultation with regional authorities. The review found an increasing trend of police holding detainees without charges, beating detainees, and arresting family members in lieu of suspects at large.

d. Arbitrary Arrest or Detention

The constitution and federal law prohibit arbitrary arrest and detention and provide for the right of any person to challenge the lawfulness of his or her arrest or detention in court. The government often did not observe these requirements, especially regarding the mass detentions made under the state of emergency (see section 1.b.).

Arrest Procedures and Treatment of Detainees

The constitution and law require detainees to appear in court and face charges within 48 hours of arrest or as soon thereafter as local circumstances and

communications permit. Travel time to the court is not included in this 48-hour period. With a warrant, authorities may detain persons suspected of serious offenses for 14 days without charge. The courts increasingly pushed authorities to present evidence or provide clear justifications within 14 days or release the detainee. Courts also demanded to see police investigative files to assess police requests for additional time.

A functioning bail system was in place. Bail was not available, however, for persons charged with murder, treason, or corruption. In other cases, the courts set bail between 500 birr (\$11.60) and 100,000 birr (\$1,900), amounts that few citizens could afford. Often police failed to release detainees after a court decided to release them on bail; sometimes, police would file another charge immediately after the court's decision. The government provided public defenders for detainees unable to afford private legal counsel, but defendants received these services only when their cases went to trial and not during the pretrial phases. In some cases, a single defense counsel represented multiple defendants in a single case. Some suspects were held incommunicado.

Arbitrary Arrest: There were reports of arbitrary arrest by security forces.

HRW reported that security forces ethnically profiled and arbitrarily arrested Tigrayans throughout the year. According to a *Reuters* report, approximately 9,000 Tigrayans were still in detention as of June 17. In addition, on June 16, HRW reported that since January, Amhara security forces had held “hundreds, possibly thousands” of Tigrayans in life-threatening conditions. Following the resumption of hostilities in August, police reportedly engaged in widespread, ethnically based detentions of Tigrayans. The Addis Ababa police commissioner maintained that arrested Tigrayans were under investigation for alleged support for the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF).

In investigations in Oromia, Gambella, Benishangul-Gumuz, and Addis Ababa, the EHRC found many detainees had been arrested without court orders or formal

investigations, and many had not been brought before court within the time the law prescribed. In addition, the EHRC reported many police stations held suspects whose charges were dropped or who should have been released in accordance with court orders. In some cases, children reportedly were held in detention on suspicion of involvement in criminal activity, contrary to the law requiring their release on unconditional bail.

In November 2021 the government reportedly commenced mass detentions of Tigrayans in Addis Ababa and throughout the country (see section 6) because of their ethnic origin. In some cases, detainees reportedly were kept in camps for an undefined period. In July the EHRC and other human rights groups raised concerns about the condition of more than 9,000 Tigrayan IDPs held for months in Semera and Agatina camps in Agatina following the November 2021 state of emergency. On August 17, the government started returning detainees to their villages in Afar Region. As of October, Afar regional authorities had released IDPs from the Semera camp and closed the camp and released nearly all IDPs from the Agatina camp. Meanwhile, as of October, security officials reportedly were holding 2,800 Tigrayan IDPs in a police training center in Awash Sebat in Afar Region.

Pretrial Detention: The proportion of the inmate population in pretrial detention and average length of time held were not available. Lengthy legal procedures, large numbers of detainees, judicial inefficiency, and staffing shortages contributed to frequent trial delays, in some cases lasting years.

e. Denial of Fair Public Trial

The law provides for an independent judiciary. Although the civil courts operated with a large degree of independence, criminal courts remained weak and overburdened.

Trial Procedures

Under the constitution, accused persons have the right to a fair, public trial without undue delay, a presumption of innocence, legal counsel of their choice, appeal, the right not to self-incriminate, the right to present witnesses and evidence in their defense, and the right to cross-examine prosecution witnesses. The law requires officials to inform detainees of the nature of their arrest within a specific period, according to the severity of the allegation. The law requires that, if necessary, translation services be provided in a language defendants understand. The federal courts are required to hire interpreters for defendants that speak other languages and had staff working as interpreters for major local languages.

The federal Public Defender's Office provided legal counsel to indigent defendants, but the scope and quality of service reportedly were inadequate due to attorney shortages. A public defender often handled more than 100 cases and might represent multiple defendants in the same criminal case. Numerous free legal-aid clinics, primarily based at universities, also provided legal services. In certain areas of the country, the law allows volunteers such as law students and professors to represent clients in court on a pro bono basis. There reportedly was a lack of a strong and inclusive local bar association or other standardized criminal defense representation.

On August 2, the Ethiopian Women Lawyers Association opposed the composition of the Ethiopian Bar Association board members appointed by Prime Minister Abiy, arguing the appointment of all men to the board "violates the principles of gender balance, inclusiveness, and equality" and calling on the decision to be reversed. The constitution recognizes both religious and traditional courts. Many rural citizens had little access to formal judicial systems and relied on traditional mechanisms for resolving conflict. By law, all parties to a dispute must agree to use a traditional or religious court before such a court may hear a case, and either party may appeal to a regular court at any time. Sharia (Islamic law) courts may hear religious and family cases involving Muslims if both parties agree before the

start of the formal legal process to use the sharia court. Sharia courts received some funding from the government. Sharia courts adjudicated most cases in Somali and Afar Regions, which are predominantly Muslim. Other traditional systems of justice, such as councils of elders, functioned predominantly in rural areas. Women often believed they lacked access to fair hearings in the traditional court system because local custom excluded them from participation in councils of elders and due to persistent gender discrimination.

Political Prisoners and Detainees

On January 7, the government released several prominent political prisoners, including Sebhat Nega, a member of the TPLF. The release included Jawar Mohammed and Eskinder Nega, prominent critics of Prime Minister Abiy, who were arrested with their colleagues following instability in 2020.

In March media reported authorities had detained several senior officials from Tigray and imprisoned them in Afar. On March 18, the EHRC confirmed to international media the arrest of eight former government officials.

There were also several reports of detentions of prominent Oromo figures. For example, on September 29, Oromia regional state security forces reportedly detained prominent Oromo scholar Alemayehu Diro and released him in late October. On September 23, security forces in Addis Ababa detained Oromo anthropologist and researcher Gemechu Megersa for a day before releasing him with a notice to report back to the police when needed.

Civil Judicial Procedures and Remedies

The law provides citizens the right to file cases in civil court, including in cases with human rights abuses. For human rights abuses where a government agency is the accused perpetrator, the victim initiates the process by filing a complaint at the EHRC. The EHRC investigates and makes recommendations to the concerned government agency.

f. Arbitrary or Unlawful Interference with Privacy, Family, Home, or Correspondence

The law generally requires authorities to obtain court-issued search warrants prior to searching private property, although the government did not always enforce this. The law also recognizes exceptions for “hot pursuit” cases in which a suspect enters premises or disposes of items that are the subject of an offense committed on the premises. This legal exception also applies when police have reasonable suspicion that evidence of a crime punishable if convicted by more than three years’ imprisonment is concealed on or in the property and a delay in obtaining a search warrant could allow for the evidence to be removed. Freedom House reported the government used location tracking and other technical means to surveil online and telephone communications. In addition, the government reportedly blocked or filtered websites for political reasons, and there was reportedly no mechanism to appeal website blocking.

g. Conflict-related Abuses

Beginning in November 2020, fighting between the ENDF and TPLF resulted in protracted conflict throughout the northern part of the country, mainly in Afar, Amhara, and Tigray Regions. During the year, conflict continued to affect civilians in those regions, where serious abuses were also reported. By year’s end, there was increasing humanitarian access to Tigray. There were numerous reports of looting and destruction of infrastructure in Afar, Amhara, and Tigray, including in refugee camps. There were reports that government security forces, regional security forces, the Eritrean Defense Forces (EDF), private militias, and the TPLF all committed human rights abuses.

Killings: There were widespread reports that government security forces unlawfully killed civilians in the context of the continuing conflict in the northern part of the country. Reports of regional militias, EDF, and rebel groups killing civilians in the context of the conflict were likewise widespread.

On July 8, the EHRC reported the TPLF and other parties to the conflict had killed 403 civilians in Afar and Amhara Regions through excessive use of force and indiscriminate attacks.

According to the ICHREE, on January 7, the air force conducted a drone strike that struck the Dedebit IDP camp, killing and injuring approximately 60 civilians and destroying civilian infrastructure. The ICHREE reported there were no soldiers or military equipment in or near the camp on the day of the attack. The renewal of fighting in the north on August 24 was followed by reports of airstrikes killing civilians. On August 26, the United Nations reported a strike in Mekele hit a kindergarten in a residential area, killing at least four children; media showed graphic remains of a demolished playground. The federal government denied the allegations, saying the air force only targeted military sites and accused TPLF forces of staging civilian deaths.

In an October report, Amnesty International stated multiple air strikes in August and September in Mekele and Adi Daero killed hundreds of civilians, including children. On September 6 to 12, the EDF, which was aligned with the ENDF, extrajudicially executed at least 40 persons, including Eritrean refugees, in Sheraro town, according to the report.

On September 14, hospital officials in Tigray's capital Mekele told media two consecutive drone strikes in a single day killed 10 civilians.

According to an April 6 joint report released by HRW and Amnesty International, authorities in the Western Tigray Zone and Amhara regional security forces, with the acquiescence and possible participation of federal forces, committed grave abuses against Tigrayans, including killings, torture, forcible transfer, rape, sexual slavery and other forms of sexual violence, persecution, enforced disappearances, widespread pillage, imprisonment, possible extermination, and other inhuman acts as part of a widespread and systematic attack against the Tigrayan civilian population. The HRW-Amnesty report also documented how Amhara authorities

and forces, at times with the acquiescence and possible participation of federal forces, carried out unlawful killings, including the summary execution by Amhara special forces of approximately 60 Tigrayan men near the Tekeze River Bridge in January 2021.

In their September report to the UN Human Rights Council, the ICHREE documented killings of civilians by TPLF forces, including in Kobo and Chenna in late August and early September 2021.

On December 4, the *Washington Post* reported prison guards had massacred scores of Tigrayan detainees in late 2021.

Abductions: The government continued to abduct Tigrayans and others who criticized the government's fight with TPLF forces and the humanitarian situation resulting from the conflict. Thousands of Tigrayans reportedly remained detained in Western Tigray at unknown locations (see section 1.d.). With the renewal of fighting August 24, the TPLF and groups allied to them reportedly unjustly detained and abducted non-Tigrayan civilians, some of whom were killed or disappeared.

Physical Abuse, Punishment, and Torture: According to the EHRC, all parties to the conflict engaged in torture and ill-treatment of civilians and captured combatants. Victims were reportedly beaten with electric cables and metal pipes, detained incommunicado, threatened with guns to their heads, and deprived of food and water. Civilians in Western Tigray were reportedly tortured and ill-treated mainly because of their ethnic identities. Elsewhere, captured soldiers and fighters, as well as civilians suspected of providing support to them, were reportedly tortured.

The ICHREE found reasonable grounds to believe that the ENDF, EDF, and the Fano militia had committed acts of rape and sexual violence against Tigrayan women and girls. In some instances, the attackers expressed an intent to render the survivors infertile and used dehumanizing language that suggested an intent to

destroy the Tigrayan ethnicity. According to the ICHREE, TPLF forces also committed acts of rape and sexual violence, albeit on a smaller scale.

According to the *Conduct in UN Field Missions* online portal, there were two open allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse by the country's peacekeepers deployed to a UN peacekeeping mission: one submitted in 2018 allegedly involving an exploitative relationship with an adult in the UN Mission in Liberia and one submitted in late 2020 allegedly involving transactional sex in the UN Interim Security Force in Abyei. As of October 2021, the United Nations had substantiated the 2018 allegation and repatriated the perpetrator, but the government had not yet reported regarding accountability measures taken. Concerning the 2020 allegation, the United Nations had taken an interim action (suspension of payments), but results of the investigation remained pending, as was any final action.

Child Soldiers: There were some reports of unlawful recruitment and use of child soldiers by government forces and armed groups. The government and the TPLF alleged the other had unlawfully recruited and used child soldiers, denying the unlawful recruitment and use of child soldiers within their own forces.

According to an October media report, the government forcibly recruited child soldiers from southern Oromia to fight against the TPLF. The government repeatedly denied the allegations of forced recruitment, maintaining youth of legal age joined security forces voluntarily.

Other Conflict-related Abuse: In the context of the conflict in the northern part of the country, international organizations, including the United Nations, reported that a humanitarian crisis, including man-made widespread famine, was unfolding and sought to assist with basic services, food, and medical supplies. The government, however, reportedly impeded or blocked access to areas in need of humanitarian assistance in Tigray, except during the humanitarian truce from March 24 to August 24 and following the November Cessation of Hostilities

Agreement (COHA). In their September report, the ICHREE found grounds to believe that the federal government and allied regional state governments have implemented a widespread range of measures designed to systematically deprive the population of Tigray of material and services indispensable for its survival, including health care, shelter, water, sanitation, education, and food.

In April HRW reported that interim authorities in control of Western Tigray, as well as Amhara authorities and forces, clarified – via oral and at times written threats – they intended to push Tigrayans out of “this land” and east across the Tekeze river (a natural boundary with the Northwestern Zone of Tigray). According to HRW, these forces, at times with the acquiescence and possible participation of federal forces, engaged in the forcible transfer of hundreds of thousands of Tigrayans from the territory (see section 2.d.). In November the TPLF reported that 3,000 additional Tigrayan men had been rounded up and moved to unknown destinations in Western Tigray.

Section 2. Respect for Civil Liberties

a. Freedom of Expression, Including for Members of the Press and Other Media

The constitution and law provide for freedom of speech, including for members of the press and other media. The government’s respect for this right deteriorated, especially in response to the conflict in the northern part of the country.

International organizations including the International Federation of Journalists, the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), Journalists Without Borders, and Freedom House, reported a decline in press freedoms.

Freedom of Expression: During the year the government restricted criticism, especially regarding the conflict in the northern part of country. The government did not allow journalists access to Tigray. According to media reports, federal government officials warned members of the press against reporting

misinformation or “promoting the terrorist group’s agenda.”

The Hate Speech and Disinformation Prevention and Suppression Proclamation addresses hate speech. The law prohibits dissemination of hate speech or disinformation through broadcasting, print, or social media using text, image, audio, or video. Conviction of a crime described under the law is punishable with imprisonment for no more than two years or a substantial monetary fine. A person convicted of violating the misinformation law may face no more than one year in prison or a substantial monetary fine. If their action results in a person or group being attacked due to hate speech, the punishment for conviction may be between one year and five years of incarceration. If a person is convicted of hate speech or disinformation via broadcasting services, print media, or a social media account of more than 5,000 followers, the violator faces one to three years in prison or a substantial monetary fine.

Violence and Harassment: In May the government launched what it called a “law enforcement operation,” which targeted journalists and opinion leaders. On May 24, the CPJ reported the arrest of 11 journalists and media workers since May 19 in Amhara Region and Addis Ababa as part of a broader crackdown. The arrests in May included prominent journalists Gobeze Sisay, Meaza Mohammed, Yayesew Shimelis, and Abebe Bayu, all arrested for the second time in a year.

In July the CPJ urged Tigrayan authorities to release five journalists who had been arrested for an undefined time without due process. The CPJ reported that Tigrayan regional authorities accused the journalists, held in the Tigrayan capital of Mekele, of “collaboration with the enemy” for their alleged work with the federal government and its ruling Prosperity Party.

Throughout the year, there were multiple reports of arrests and rearrests of journalists, denial of release by police after a court decision to release them on bail, and reversal of lower court decisions by higher courts because of pressure from the executive or the army.

On May 26, authorities detained journalist Temesgen Desalegn, editor of the privately owned magazine *Feteh*, and charged him with disclosing military secrets. On July 4, the Federal High Court Lideta Division First Constitutional and Terrorism Criminal Bench granted Temesgen bail of 100,000 birr (\$1,900). On July 20, Temesgen's defense lawyer told local media that members of the ENDF had threatened to "take measures on him" if he was released. On July 28, the federal Supreme Court overturned a lower court's decision to grant Temesgen bail and ordered him to remain in detention for the duration of his trial. On November 16, police released Temesgen following the Federal High Court's decision to release him on bond with 30,000 birr (\$558) after months of imprisonment and repeated denial of his right to bail by government security forces.

On May 13, the Ethiopian Media Authority (EMA) revoked the license of reporter Tom Gardner of *The Economist*, alleging he failed to meet the "standards of conduct for journalists." Subsequently, authorities forced the reporter to leave Addis Ababa within 48 hours. The government had publicly warned Gardner in March about a tweet the government said contained information that was "not properly sourced or supported by appropriate authorities."

Censorship or Content Restrictions for Members of the Press and Other Media, Including Online Media: While independent media were active, reports of harassment, intimidation, and other restrictions of journalists critical of the government – especially its response to the conflict and humanitarian crisis in the northern part of the country – were widespread. The EMA restricted some freedom of expression for members of the press.

Regional news agencies and social media influencers amplified messages that led to "echo chambers," which often were biased towards ethnic interests. News agencies withheld, underreported, downplayed, or discredited reports of abuses against rival ethnic groups.

Libel/Slander Laws: According to the NGO End Blasphemy Laws, the law

provides criminal sanctions for blasphemy or scoffing at religious places or ceremonies.

National Security: The government charged some journalists on national security grounds.

On May 2, the CPJ reported journalists Dessu Dulla and Bikila Amenu faced the death penalty on antistate charges. On April 7, authorities in Oromia charged Dessu and Bikila, both working for the news outlet Oromia Media Network (OMN), under Article 238 of the country's criminal code, which bars "outrages against the constitution" and sanctions a penalty as high as death. On November 29, the CPJ reported that a court had acquitted the two journalists of the antistate charges and released them on November 15.

On August 29, after the renewal of fighting in the north, the EMA threatened to hold accountable media establishments found to be "forgoing of national interest and peace shattering." The EMA director general told local media that priority should be given to national interest and preserving communal peace and security in covering news events. On August 31, the Federal Police Commission said it filed charges against 111 "illegal digital media" outlets suspected of "working to make Ethiopia a center of violence."

Nongovernmental Impact: In July the EHRC reported that Tigrayan regional authorities had declared a state of emergency law that labelled the federal government as an "enemy" and criminalized working with the federal government, including for journalists. Subsequently, Tigrayan authorities reportedly arrested *Tigray TV* journalists Teshome Temalew, Misgena Seyoum, Haben Halefom, Hailemichael Gesesse, and Dawit Mekonnen for reportedly working with the Tigray Transitional Administration instituted by the federal government.

Internet Freedom

The government periodically restricted and disrupted access to the internet and

blocked social media sites, especially in areas affected by conflict. The government's monopoly on the telecommunications sector – through state-owned EthioTelecom – enabled it to control the online media space by leveraging nationwide and regional shutdowns. The opening of telecom service to foreign companies did not immediately affect internet freedom; Safaricom Ethiopia started service in August.

Since 2020, telephone, cell phone, and internet services were not functional in much of Tigray Region. Following the signing of the COHA, the government started to restore telephone and limited internet connections primarily in government-controlled areas in Tigray. In other areas, there were reports of intermittent blackouts targeting websites and social media platforms suspected of expressing or encouraging antigovernment sentiments (see section 1.f.).

In response to recurrent killings of civilians in western Oromia and other areas of the country, the government reportedly blocked communications, making it difficult for media to report and verify information for human rights organizations.

On July 4, internet and telephone communications were shut down in Kellem Wollega, Oromia Region, as Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed tweeted about the killing of hundreds of civilians allegedly by the OLA. The Amhara Association of America claimed internet and telephone communication was shut down following a similar attack on civilians in Jardega Jarte, Horo Guduru Wollega, Oromia Region, by armed groups on September 24.

Restrictions on Academic Freedom and Cultural Events

Laws governing academic curriculum rely on a proclamation from 2009 which restricts academic freedom by means of minimum requirements for being consistent with international good practice and cultural responsibility.

b. Freedoms of Peaceful Assembly and Association

The constitution and law provide for the freedoms of peaceful assembly and association, and the government generally respected these rights. Permission to hold peaceful rallies is required. Holding unrecognized rallies may result in legal liability.

Freedom of Peaceful Assembly

Demonstrations were infrequent. When sustained demonstrations did occur, they often reflected an important shift in the political environment. On July 24, university students in Amhara Region started a demonstration denouncing the June 18 killing of more than 200 Amhara by armed groups in Tole Kebele, Gimbi Woreda of the West Wollega zone of Oromia Region. On June 25, protesters in Addis Ababa denounced the killing and criticized the government's inability to curb worsening ethnic violence; police forcefully dispersed the students and reportedly arrested some protesters. On July 4, media outlet Deutsche Welle Amharic reported security forces had killed up to 12 protestors in Shewa Robit town in Amhara Region for denouncing the Tole killing.

c. Freedom of Religion

See the Department of State's *International Religious Freedom Report* at <https://www.state.gov/religiousfreedomreport/>.

d. Freedom of Movement and the Right to Leave the Country

The law provides for the freedom of internal movement, foreign travel, migration, and repatriation, and the government generally respected these rights.

In-country Movement: The government restricted in-country movement in some areas, especially movement into and out of Tigray Region in view of the conflict there and other regions experiencing violence, including parts of Benishangul-

Gumuz and Western Oromia. Many routes connecting Tigray with other parts of the country were blocked or inaccessible, especially during active conflict. Federal and regional authorities erected an extensive system of checkpoints on the road connecting Semera in Afar Region to Tigray, which at times impeded travel including for those seeking to deliver humanitarian assistance. During the truce from March to August, humanitarian aid convoys entered regularly. While there was no access following the resumption of hostilities on August 24, humanitarian aid started flowing once again after the COHA was signed on November 2.

On August 11, local rights group the Ethiopian Human Rights Council (EHRCO) called on the government to respect citizens' freedom of movement, following reports of passengers from eastern Amhara Region being denied entrance to the outskirts of Addis Ababa.

On September 17, the EHRC reported that 2,800 internally displaced Tigrayans, who were transferred from Jarre camp in Amhara to a police training center in Awash Sebat in Afar, lacked freedom of movement for an extended period.

e. Protection of Refugees

The government collaborated with the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and other humanitarian organizations in expanding protection and assistance to IDPs, refugees, returning refugees, or asylum seekers, as well as other persons of concern in most regions of the country. The government allowed UNHCR and other humanitarian organizations only limited access in Tigray, impeding delivery of lifesaving assistance to refugees and other populations in need in the region. Shortages of fuel, cash, and humanitarian aid supplies due to bureaucratic impediments created additional challenges in delivering humanitarian aid.

As of August, federal, regional, and local government restrictions were a major problem for the humanitarian response in eastern Amhara, particularly in efforts to support IDPs and refugees, many of whom the Amhara regional government

suspected of harboring connections to the TPLF. The government reportedly restricted aid at Turk, an IDP camp near South Wello's Hayk town estimated to hold 3,000 persons, primarily Tigrayan IDPs and Eritrean refugees. The Ethiopian Federal Police operated the camp and reportedly held the Turk residents in inhuman, prison-like conditions with no freedom of movement. Armed guards and barbed wire fencing reportedly prevented IDPs from leaving the camp, even to seek medical treatment. Shelters were heavily overcrowded, and no food, health, humanitarian protection, or nutrition assistance were available inside the camp. This led to widespread food insecurity, lack of treatment for chronic health conditions, and lack of support for survivors of gender-based violence.

Access to Asylum: The law provides for the granting of asylum or refugee status, and the government used a refugee status determination system for providing services and protection to refugees. UNHCR reported the government did not register Eritrean arrivals because it ceased granting prima facie recognition for Eritrean asylum seekers in 2020. This led to an increase in unregistered Eritrean asylum seekers with no access to basic services due to lack of a refugee status determination.

UNHCR reported a change in the status determination process for South Sudanese asylum seekers, who since 2021 were subject to a group screening process to determine eligibility for refugee status rather than prima facie recognition. The Ethiopian Refugee and Returnee Service described this as an attempt to curb the influx from South Sudan and distinguish conflict-driven asylum seekers from economic ones, as well as those driven by environmental factors such as flooding.

Refoulement: In January HRW reported that authorities had arbitrarily detained, mistreated, and forcibly disappeared thousands of ethnic Tigrayans forcibly repatriated by Saudi Arabia.

Abuse of Migrants and Refugees: Due to the conflict in the north of the country, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) suspended all return assistance

in November 2021 for migrants who wanted to voluntarily return to Ethiopia. Although the IOM instituted partial return assistance to Amhara and Afar Regions at the end of June, some migrants from conflict-affected regions remain stranded in various IOM-managed facilities, unable to return to Ethiopia.

The northern conflict continued to have a negative impact on the protection of Eritrean refugees. In February 2021 the government closed two of the four refugee camps hosting Eritrean refugees in Tigray – Shimelba and Hitsats – after they were destroyed in the fighting. The approximately 32,000 refugees resident in Shimelba and Hitsats were subsequently displaced, with some relocating to the Mai Aini and Adi Harush camps in southern Tigray, some relocating to Addis Ababa, some remaining with host communities elsewhere in Tigray, and others migrating outside of Ethiopia. As of October 2021, UNHCR could not account for the whereabouts of more than 6,000 Eritrean refugees. Refugees in Mai Aini and Adi Harush camps were deprived of lifesaving assistance for months during the de facto blockade of Tigray and were targeted by various armed elements with harassment and violence. On January 6, an airstrike hit the Mai Aini refugee camp and killed three Eritrean refugees (see section 1.g.).

UNHCR established a settlement in Alemwach camp in Dabat woreda in Amhara Region to resettle Eritrean refugees from Mai Aini and Adi Harush, but as of October 2021, UNHCR was unable to carry out an organized, large-scale relocation due to continuing conflict in the area. Some refugees from the two sites spontaneously self-relocated across the Tigray/Amhara border to Alemwach, facing numerous protection risks, including gender-based violence, on the journey. Alemwach hosted 22,000 refugees as of December 9.

On October 3, UN experts, including the special rapporteur on trafficking in persons, expressed alarm concerning reports of abduction of women attempting to move to safer places from conflict-affected areas in the country. The statement also voiced concern about Eritrean refugee women and children being at risk of trafficking for sexual exploitation following abductions and displacement.

Freedom of Movement: In 2020 the former Agency for Refugee and Returnee Affairs, now Refugee and Returnee Service (RRS), released a directive permitting refugees to leave the camps if they met certain criteria.

Employment: The Right to Work Directive provides for the right to work of refugees working on a joint project with local nationals, and for the right to work of refugees seeking wage-earning employment in a position unable to be filled by a citizen, or through self-employment. RRS reported that as of October, approximately 2,675 residence permits had been granted through the program during the year.

Access to Basic Services: Refugee students who passed the required tests could attend a university with fees paid by the government and UNHCR.

f. Status and Treatment of Internally Displaced Persons

As of October, the IOM's *Displacement Tracking Matrix* estimated there were 2.1 million IDPs in the country spread across 2,158 sites, a decrease from 2021 mainly due to lack of access to Tigray Region. According to the Protection Cluster, as of September the northern conflict accounted for more than 50 percent of the IDP population across the country, internally displacing more than three million individuals across Afar, Amhara, and Tigray. There were also significant IDP populations in Benishangul-Gumuz and Oromia Regions. The IOM concluded that conflict remained the primary reason for displacement, followed by drought, flooding, and social tensions.

The IOM found that IDPs had limited access to basic services and livelihood opportunities, and faced significant protection risks, including exposure to continuing violence, lack of educational opportunities, and lack of health care. Months of high inflation combined with disruption of farming activities due to conflict and below-normal harvests resulted in rising commodity prices and spiraling levels of food insecurity, hunger, and malnutrition. As of July, 13 million individuals needed food assistance across all three regions, a 44 percent increase

from November 2021. The Protection Cluster continued to receive credible reports of IDP deaths from starvation. In many displacement sites, IDPs reported food shortages, with COVID-19 pandemic restrictions having reduced the supply and availability of staple commodities. In some instances, the government strongly encouraged or enforced returns of IDPs without adequate arrangements for security or sustainable provision of basic services.

The ICHREE reported the ENDF conducted a drone strike against the Dedebit IDP camp on January 7 (see section 1.g.).

Section 3. Freedom to Participate in the Political Process

The constitution and law provide citizens the ability to choose their government in free and fair periodic elections held by secret ballot and based on universal and equal suffrage.

Elections and Political Participation

Recent Elections: The country's sixth general election took place in June 2021. Domestic and international nonpartisan observers generally agreed the June 2021 elections were peaceful. While observers considered the elections a positive step in the country's democratic trajectory, they also cited challenges, including security problems and large turnouts that overwhelmed polling stations across the country. Observers also noted that the elections took place against a backdrop of grave instability, including interethnic and intercommunal violence, and an electoral process that was not free or fair for all citizens. While some major opposition parties boycotted the elections, observers assessed the result generally reflected the will of most citizens. According to National Election Board of Ethiopia (NEBE), 30 of the 47 parties that participated in the elections filed complaints regarding the election, covering 160 constituencies.

In July 2021 the NEBE announced the results for 423 of the 547 (77 percent) of the House of Peoples' Representatives (HOPR) constituencies. In September 2021 the

NEBE held a second round of elections for an additional 47 constituencies (constituting 9 percent of the electorate) in Somali, Harari, and SNNPR. Of these, NEBE held reruns of 11 constituencies where elections were held in June 2021, but neither the board nor the courts identified irregularities requiring a rerun.

In a second round in September 2021, the NEBE announced the Prosperity Party added 45 seats in the HOPR by winning 20 in the SNNPR, 23 in Somali, and two in Harari Regions, bringing the total seats announced to 468 of 547 seats (85.5 percent). The status of an additional 74 constituencies (approximately 14 percent), was still not clear by the year's end, including 35 constituencies spread across several regions and the 38 constituencies in Tigray Region, which represent 7 percent of the HOPR seats.

Prime Minister Abiy's Prosperity Party dominated, winning 96 percent of the seats. In October 2021 the country began the process of forming a government during joint sessions of the HOPR and the House of Federation – the lower and upper chambers of parliament, respectively. The HOPR accepted the nomination by the majority Prosperity Party of Abiy Ahmed to serve as prime minister.

Political Parties and Political Participation: Registered political parties must receive permission from regional governments to open and occupy local offices. The law requires parties to report “public meetings” and obtain permission for public rallies.

In March 2021 the government issued a law which reduced the 5,000 signatures private candidates were required to collect to 2,500. The signature requirement for candidates with disabilities was also reduced from 3,000 to 1,500. The government allowed opposition parties to participate in debates, hold rallies, and campaign actively, although there were serious government abuses. In June 2021, prior to the election, several political parties issued a joint statement concerning the electoral process. The political parties alleged government abuses against their candidates, including killings, attempted killings, beatings, arbitrary detention, and

harassment. Some government organizations reportedly forced candidates to accept leave without pay on a mandatory basis. Opposition parties complained that measures the government took against their candidates negatively affected their preparations for the election.

In March 2021 two major political parties in Oromia boycotted the election. The Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) – one of the country’s oldest parties with a major following in Oromia – pulled out, citing the jailing of some of its leaders and the alleged closure of its offices by the government, including its headquarters in the capital. In the same month, the Oromo Federalist Congress announced that it was forced to pull out of the election on similar grounds.

More opposition parties withdrew from the second round of the elections in September 2021. In September 2021 the Executive Committee of the Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF) – the major opposition group in Somali Region – announced its decision to “withdraw from the 2021 election.” ONLF’s statement on the election accused NEBE of failing to ensure conditions for a free and fair election despite the party’s “repeated appeals” on the ruling party’s fraud in voter and candidate registration. The Freedom and Equality Party and the Ethiopian Citizens for Social Justice (EZEMA) also announced their withdrawal from the September 2021 elections.

Although some reports characterized the election process as not conducive for opposition parties, opposition parties won 12 seats in the HOPR. The National Movement of Amhara (NAMA) won five seats in Amhara, while EZEMA, the Gedeo People’s Democratic Organization, and the Kucha People’s Democratic Party (KPDP) won four, two, and one seats, respectively, in SNPPR. In Oromia two independent candidates with no clear ties to the government won seats. The other two winning independent candidates – one in Oromia and one in Addis Ababa – were known advisors to the prime minister. While opposition parties garnered more seats than before, they did not win the 21 seats needed to introduce legislation or amendments or to raise topics for discussion within the HOPR.

The government invited opposition parties to work together and participate in the government. In October 2021 the government appointed EZEMA Executive Committee member Girma Seifu as head of the Investment Commission and the deputy chairman of NAMA as head of the Addis Ababa Public Property Administration Authority, although they were not elected. During its first extraordinary session in October 2021, the HOPR approved the appointment of a 22-member cabinet including three opposition leaders: EZEMA Leader Berhanu Nega as minister of education, NAMA Chair Belete Molla as minister of innovation and technology, and OLF deputy chair Qajela Merdassa as minister of culture and sports.

Participation of Women and Members of Minority Groups: No laws prevent women or members of minority groups from voting or participating in political life, although patriarchal customs, religious factors, and family commitments limited women's participation in political life in some cases. Since same-sex activity is illegal, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and intersex (LGBTQI+) persons did not identify themselves in political activity and did not openly participate. During election periods, women experienced more psychological abuse and violence than physical violence in comparison to men. Women were also more likely to experience sexual harassment within political party structures or when running for office.

Although many women went to the polls in the 2021 election, the Ethiopian Women Lawyers Association (EWLA) reported that the environment at polling stations put women at risk of harassment and violence. EWLA criticized NEBE for not taking a more gender-sensitive approach to election day administration. EWLA stated that the extension of voting time until 9:00 p.m. had a disproportionately negative impact on women voters, observers, and officials because women faced a higher risk of sexual harassment and gender-based violence at night. EWLA also explained that the long lines left women voters at higher risk of experiencing sexual harassment.

The Federation of Ethiopia Associations of Persons with Disabilities (FEAPD) deployed its representatives to observe the 2021 general election. In its preliminary report, FEAPD noted accessibility for persons with disabilities was hindered, and that persons with disabilities required additional assistance to access 22 percent of the polling stations visited by observers. FEAPD also noted that of the approximately 200 polling stations they observed, only one government official in one polling station was a person with a disability. In 11 percent of polling stations, political parties fielded persons with disabilities as partisan observers. Local human rights organizations also reported that millions of IDPs could not participate in the election because NEBE did not establish polling places in displacement camps.

Although there were increases in women's representation, women remained significantly underrepresented across both elected and appointed positions. In October 2021 the HOPR appointed only seven women ministers to the 22-member cabinet – a decrease from approximately 42 percent of the ministers previously to 30 percent.

The government's policy of ethnic federalism led to the creation of individual constituencies to provide representation for all major ethnic groups in the House of the Federation. The government recognized more than 80 ethnicities, and the constitution states that at least one member represent each "Nation, Nationality, and People" in the House of the Federation.

Section 4. Corruption and Lack of Transparency in Government

The law provides criminal penalties for conviction of corruption. The government did not implement the law effectively or comprehensively. The government enacted policies to hold government officials more accountable. There were isolated reports of government corruption. Officials sometimes reportedly engaged in corrupt practices with impunity, and citizens continued to express their

grievances about corruption in government services.

Corruption: On July 13, police detained Mitiku Kassa, commissioner of the Ethiopian National Disaster Risk Management Commission on corruption charges. Following the arrest, police released a list of accusations against the commissioner. On August 26, the government attorney's office filed charges against Mitiku and his two children for involvement in corruption, and legal proceedings were ongoing by year's end.

On July 14, the Addis Ababa city administration arrested 10 officials, including the city administration's bureau head for innovation and technology, following allegations of interfering with the public housing lottery system. High levels of public grievances related to corruption were reported in government services related to land management and administration across the country.

Section 5. Governmental Posture Towards International and Nongovernmental Investigation of Alleged Abuses of Human Rights

While a variety of domestic and a few international human rights groups operated in the country, persistent insecurity and government-imposed access restrictions limited the groups' ability to conduct investigations and publish their findings on human rights cases. Authorities limited the access of domestic and international human rights organizations, media, humanitarian agencies, and diplomatic missions in certain geographic areas. Government officials were particularly sensitive to any investigation or reporting connected to the continuing conflict in the northern part of the country or relating to Oromia and Benishangul-Gumuz Regions, where allegations of human rights violations and abuses remained uninvestigated. Minister of Justice Gedion Timothewos, however, sent a letter on November 29 to international partners, the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, and EHRC requesting support for "joint monitoring missions across conflict-affected areas in a manner that feeds into the future transitional

justice mechanism.” Although the civil society organization (CSO) sector continued to expand, and more CSOs registered to establish themselves, the limited capacity of domestic human rights organizations, as well as their self-censorship due to fear of government retaliation, remained a challenge.

The United Nations or Other International Bodies: In December 2021 the government opposed the establishment of the ICHREE to conduct a thorough and impartial investigation into allegations of violations and abuses of international human rights law and violations of international humanitarian law and international refugee law committed since November 3, 2020.

In July the ICHREE visited Addis Ababa, but the government restricted the commission’s access outside the capital, blocking a planned visit to areas of conflict. The ICHREE during its stay from July 24 to 30 consulted with federal government officials, related institutions, international organizations, academic experts, and others, although the ICHREE was unable to meet with victims. The telecommunications blackout in Tigray (see section 2.a.) also impeded the ICHREE’s ability to conduct remote interviews with victims.

On September 19, the ICHREE tabled its first report to the UN Human Rights Council, which implicated the government and other actors involved in the conflict in northern Ethiopia in “significant violations of international human rights and humanitarian law, many of which may amount to war crimes.” Because the ICHREE did not have access to areas of conflict, the report focused on several “illustrative incidents” of human rights abuses in the context of the northern conflict. The government rejected the report, calling it “incomplete and politically motivated.” Over objections by the government, on October 7, the UN Human Rights Council extended the ICHREE’s mandate until December 2023. By year’s end, the ICHREE could not access sites of human rights violations and abuses to conduct its investigation.

Government Human Rights Bodies: The Office of the Ombudsman has the

authority to investigate complaints regarding administrative mismanagement by executive branch offices and officials, and to investigate prison conditions. A 2019 proclamation gives foreign nationals the right to present administrative complaints or rights abuse cases to the office.

The EHRC is a quasi-independent government agency accountable to parliament and responsible for investigating and reporting on the country's human rights. The EHRC has the jurisdiction to observe elections. The law requires EHRC senior staff to be funded as full-time employees. The EHRC investigated human rights abuses across the country. The EHRC did not face adverse action from the government despite criticizing the government for disregarding the rule of law and abusing human rights, including through ethnic profiling of Tigrayans, arbitrary arrests of journalists, and ethnically and politically motivated killings.

International human rights experts, however, accused the EHRC of systematic bias against Tigrayans when reporting on the conflict, and of deliberately censoring information about alleged atrocities attributed to the government and its allies. In some instances, federal and regional government bodies appeared to follow EHRC reports and recommendations in taking corrective measures in response to human rights violations and abuses.

Section 6. Discrimination and Societal Abuses

Women

Rape and Domestic Violence: The law criminalizes rape and provides for a penalty of five to 20 years' imprisonment if convicted, depending on the severity of the case. The law does not expressly address spousal rape. The government did not fully enforce the law. The law generally covers violence against a marriage partner or a person cohabiting in an irregular union without specifically mentioning spousal rape. Some judges interpreted this article to cover spousal rape cases, but others overlooked such cases.

International and local human rights organizations reported alarming levels of rape and sexual violence by all parties in the context of the conflict in the northern part of the country (see section 1.g.).

On July 8, the EHRC reported that sexual and gender-based violence occurred in all conflict-affected areas of the country. Some organizations reported that conflict-induced displacement had led to increased reports of rape and sexual violence including sexual slavery and sexual exploitation and abuse.

In its annual report, the EHRC indicated pervasive incidents of gender-based violence across the country. The EHRC stated that impunity for perpetrators of sexual violence continued to be a problem. According to EHRC's report, women and children continued to be targeted and were exposed to a wide range of human rights violations and abuses in Tigray, Afar, Amhara, Benishangul-Gumuz, Oromia, and SNNPR.

On October 6, the United Nations Population Fund reported close to six million individuals needed services for gender-based violence, an increase from 3.5 million in 2021. The need was greatest in regions affected by conflict, drought, and floods. The report indicated women and girls accounted for most survivors seeking services, with gender-based violence against men and boys also recorded although highly underreported. According to the report, access to multisectoral services for women and girls remained low due to fear of stigma, access to services, and lower service availability. In October the Dr. Denis Mukwege Foundation at Washington University reported survivors of conflict-related sexual violence lacked access to critical support services such as sexual and reproductive healthcare, psychosocial support, and safe shelter due to limited access to conflict-affected areas (see section 1.g.).

Domestic violence is illegal, but government enforcement of the law was inconsistent. Depending on the severity of injuries inflicted, penalties for conviction ranged from small monetary fines to 15 years' imprisonment. Domestic

violence, including spousal abuse, was a pervasive social problem. According to the *2016 Demographic and Health Survey (DHS)*, 34 percent of married women and girls between ages 15 and 49 had experienced physical, sexual, or emotional violence from spouses.

Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting (FGM/C): The law criminalizes the practice of clitoridectomy and provides for three months' imprisonment or a monetary fine if convicted. Conviction of infibulation of the genitals (the most extreme and dangerous form of FGM/C) is punishable by five to 10 years' imprisonment.

According to research by BioMed Central Public Health published in January 2021, the prevalence of FGM/C among girls from birth to age 14 was 18.6 percent, representing a decline compared with 24 percent reported in the Ethiopia *DHS* conducted in 2005. BioMed's research indicated FGM/C was still widely practiced across communities (16 percent among girls younger than age 14, and 65 percent among girls and women ages 15 to 49 years). The country was home to 25 million circumcised women and girls.

Other Forms of Gender-based Violence: Marriage by abduction is illegal, although it reportedly continued in some regions despite the government's attempts to combat the practice. Abductions reportedly led to fighting among families, communities, and ethnic groups. In cases of abduction, the perpetrator did not face punishment if the survivor agreed to marry the perpetrator. The practice of forced marriage as a remedy for rape continued, although rape and forced marriage are illegal. These crimes were difficult to prosecute since they were usually settled outside courts of law. Some communities reportedly forced rapists to marry the survivor to protect her family's reputation. Rapists who married survivors escaped punishment and might also benefit from a lowered bride price demanded by the survivor's family.

Sexual Harassment: Reports of sexual harassment were widespread. The law prescribes penalties of 18 to 24 months' imprisonment, but authorities generally

did not enforce the law. The EHRC reported a wide range of factors that exacerbated sexual harassment, including conflict, drought, increased IDP populations, and inadequate working conditions for women in industrial parks.

Reproductive Rights: There were no reports of coerced abortion or involuntary sterilization on the part of government authorities.

The constitution protects the rights of women to access family planning resources and safeguard their health during pregnancy and childbirth. Social and cultural barriers limited women's access to reproductive health services. According to the *2016 DHS*, 85 percent of married or in-union women in the country made decisions on their health care; 94 percent had autonomy in deciding to use contraception; but only 53 percent could refuse to have sex with their partners. Overall, only 45 percent of married or in-union women ages 15 to 49 made their own decisions in all three key areas of sexual and reproductive health and rights: deciding on their own health care, deciding on the use of contraception, and saying no to sex. While 53 percent of married or in-union women reported being able to say no to sex, the law does not protect this right.

According to the *2019 Ethiopia Mini Demographic and Health Survey* (EMDHS), 95 percent of women of reproductive age had access to family planning with modern methods. According to 2018 World Health Organization (WHO) data, the country had an adolescent birth rate (per 1,000 girls ages 15 to 19) of 79.5. The 2019 EMDHS shows on average, women ages 45-49 have given birth to 6.7 children. Despite nationwide access to contraception, negative cultural stigma around premarital sex reduced utilization of contraception. Transportation problems in remote areas of the country also reduced utilization of contraception. According to a small-scale DHS in 2019, the modern contraception prevalence rate was 41 percent, up from 35 percent in 2016. Prevalence and utilization of contraception varied widely among regions.

Skilled health personnel attended 48 percent of births according to 2019 EMDHS

data. Although the government provided free maternal and child health services, challenges from resource constraints and poor transportation in remote areas persisted for women in accessing skilled health attendance during pregnancy and childbirth. Lack of skilled health attendance during pregnancy correlated with the country's high maternal mortality rate – 401 deaths per 100,000 live births according to 2017 WHO data. Major causes of maternal mortality included hemorrhage, obstructed labor/ruptured uterus, pregnancy-induced hypertension, sepsis, and unsafe abortion.

Girls and women who have had FGM/C were significantly more likely to have adverse obstetric outcomes, including maternal death (see FGM/C sub-subsection for additional information). While access to some sexual and reproductive health services was available for survivors of gender-based violence at public-sector facilities, more comprehensive services for survivors – including legal and judicial support – were limited. Survivors of gender-based violence in areas impacted by the conflict in the northern part of the country faced lasting medical and mental health complications due to a lack of sexual and reproductive health services associated with the destruction of medical facilities and limitations on humanitarian access.

Social and cultural barriers related to menstruation and access to menstruation hygiene, as well as pregnancy and motherhood, limited girls' access to education. According to a 2017 UNICEF regional survey, 11 to 46 percent of girls missed between one and seven days of school a month due to menstruation, depending on the region in which they lived. The girls surveyed attributed their absences to lack of adequate hygiene facilities at school and embarrassment due to cultural stigma regarding menstruation. UNICEF also cited early pregnancy as a key factor that kept girls out of school, especially in rural areas.

Discrimination: The law provides for equal rights for women and men, both of whom have the same rights entering marriage, during marriage, and at the time of divorce. Discrimination against women was widespread. It was most acute in

rural areas, where an estimated 80 percent of the population lived. Traditional courts applied customary law in economic and social relationships.

All federal and regional land laws empower women to access government land. Inheritance laws enable widows to inherit joint property acquired during marriage; however, enforcement of both legal provisions was uneven.

Women's access to gainful employment, credit, and the opportunity to own or manage a business was limited by fewer educational opportunities and by legal restrictions on women's employment. These restrictions include limitations on working in occupations deemed dangerous and in specific industries such as mining and agriculture. There were several initiatives aimed at increasing women's access to these critical economic empowerment tools.

Systemic Racial or Ethnic Violence and Discrimination

The constitution and law provide for equal protection to all persons without discrimination on grounds of race, nation, nationality, or other social origin. While the government generally enforced the law effectively, there were widespread allegations of government security forces targeting individuals for arrest and detention based on ethnicity in response to the conflict in the north of the country.

According to the 2007 census, the country had more than 80 ethnic groups, of which the Oromo, at approximately 34 percent of the population, was the largest. An updated census remained controversial; one was slated for 2019 but was postponed indefinitely. The federal system and constitution define political boundaries based on ethnic considerations, but the documents themselves were not drawn along such boundaries. Many political parties were primarily ethnic based, although the ruling party and one of the largest opposition parties were not organized along ethnic lines.

There were several cases of societal violence affecting members of national, racial, or ethnic minorities or groups. Ethnic-based violence intensified during the year in

the Wollega zones of Oromia Region. In an August 31 report, HRW reported on June 18, unknown armed men targeted ethnic Amhara communities and killed 400 civilians in Tole Kebele of Gimbi Woreda in western Oromia. Between June and August, HRW interviewed 25 individuals by telephone, including 19 witnesses and relatives of victims from five villages in Tole Kebele in western Oromia and a village in neighboring Sene kebele in Benishangul Gumuz Region; all recounted a continued and targeted killing of civilians based on their ethnic identity. The government blamed the attacks on the OLA, but the OLA rejected the accusation and demanded an independent investigation. In their September report to the Human Rights Council, the ICHREE noted allegations of killings of hundreds of civilians in southwest Oromia from June through August.

In June 2021 following federal forces' withdrawal from Tigray, security forces allegedly engaged in arbitrary detention and arrest, closed businesses, and conducted other types of harassment targeting ethnic Tigrayans in some parts of the country, including Addis Ababa. In late 2021 the government began detaining under the November 2021 State of Emergency (SOE) ethnic Tigrayans in Addis Ababa and other parts of the country, before releasing many detainees in February and March (see sections 1.d. and 1.g.). By mid-year, all of those detained under the November 2021 SOE had reportedly been released. An unknown number of ethnic Tigrayans, potentially arrested prior to November 2021 or under pretexts other than the SOE, reportedly remained detained at year's end. In February local officials in Amaro Special Woreda of SNNPR reported "hundreds" of civilians had been killed and 44,202 individuals had been displaced from their homes because of recurring violence.

Children

Birth Registration: A child's citizenship derives from the child's parents. The law requires registration for children at birth. Children born in hospitals were registered; most of those born outside of hospitals were not. The overwhelming majority of children, particularly in rural areas, were born at home. The

government continued a campaign initiated in 2017 to increase birth registrations by advising that failure to register would result in denial of public services.

Education: The law does not make education compulsory. Primary education is universal and tuition free; however, there were not enough schools to accommodate the country's youth, particularly in rural areas and areas affected by the conflict and drought. The cost of school supplies was prohibitive for many families. During the year the city government of Addis Ababa provided school uniforms and supplies to students in all government schools. According to the most recent data, more than 18 million children were enrolled at the primary level with a net enrollment rate of just under 100 percent. The high enrollment overburdened the education system, and student learning suffered. There were no significant differences in enrollment rates between boys and girls in primary schools, but girls' enrollment and completion declined in the upper grades.

The war in the northern part of the country and other violence throughout the country negatively affected the education system. The United Nations reported as of May, 1.39 million children in Tigray Region were missing education because of the continued conflict. In July the EHRC reported that the drought that affected Somali and Oromia Regions forced more than 300,000 children out of school.

On January 6, the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) stated that the impact of the conflict on schooling had deprived millions of children of education for over a year in some areas. In Amhara Region, 4,107 schools (3,823 primary and 284 secondary schools), accounting for 42 percent of the schools in the region, were totally or partially damaged and looted, according to an initial assessment by the Ministry of Education and the Regional Education Bureau. In the assessment released in January, more than 1.9 million children, 116,939 teachers, 9,583 school leaders, and 1,941 Zonal and Woreda Education personnel were directly affected. Similarly in Tigray, more than 1,000 schools were damaged or looted and needed renovation or clearance from explosive devices. In Afar, 203 schools were damaged (32 percent completely),

affecting more than 150,000 students.

Child Abuse: Reports of child abuse were widespread. Uvula cutting, tonsil scraping, and milk-tooth extraction were among the most prevalent harmful traditional practices. The *African Report on Child Wellbeing 2013*, published by the African Child Policy Forum, found the government had increased punishment for conviction of sexual violence against children. “Child-friendly” courtrooms heard cases involving violence against children and women.

Child, Early, and Forced Marriage: The law sets the legal age of marriage for girls and boys at 18. Authorities, however, did not enforce this law uniformly, and rural families sometimes were unaware of this provision. Some regions worked on banning early marriages. Based on 2016 UNICEF data, 40 percent of women between ages 20 and 24 were married before age 18, and 14 percent were married before age 15. The government strategy to address underage marriage focused on education and mediation rather than punishment of offenders. In April UNICEF reported many girls in the country were forced to marry at a young age because of the worst drought the Horn of Africa had faced in 40 years. In 2016, 40 percent of girls were married before age 18 and 14 percent before age 15. UNICEF recorded 2,282 cases of child marriage from September 2021 to March, compared to 672 instances in the first half of 2021, showing a dramatic increase.

Sexual Exploitation of Children: The minimum legal age for consensual sex is 18, but authorities did not enforce this law. The antitrafficking law criminalizes all forms of child sex trafficking. Some families and brothel owners reportedly exploited girls from the country’s impoverished rural areas for domestic servitude and commercial sex. There were reports that brothel owners exploited girls for commercial sex in Addis Ababa’s central market.

Infanticide, including Infanticide of Children with Disabilities: Ritual and superstition-based infanticide, including of infants with disabilities, continued in remote tribal areas, particularly in South Omo. Local governments worked to

educate communities against the practice.

Displaced Children: National data on homeless households, including children, are scarce. The Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs placed the number of homeless persons in Addis Ababa at approximately 24,000 in 2018, with 10,500 street children and 13,500 homeless adults. In November the Ministry of Women and Social Affairs reported to parliament it had reintegrated 3,000 children into their families in the first quarter of the fiscal year. The ministry noted the inability of families to support children due to parental illness or insufficient household income left many children on the streets of Addis Ababa. The problem was exacerbated by rapid urbanization, illegal employment brokers, high expectations of better life in cities, and rural-to-urban migration. These children often begged, sometimes as part of a gang, or worked in the informal sector.

In May a report by the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC) indicated there were around 4.2 million IDPs in Ethiopia, primarily children and women. According to the OCHA 2022 *Ethiopia Humanitarian Response Plan*, conflict and climate contributed to a high number of unaccompanied displaced children. The report stated that all children faced multiple kinds of violence, loss of essential services like education, and exploitation including child labor and child sex trafficking. OCHA said 269,000 girls and boys, including unaccompanied and separated children, need child protection and support. The Ethiopia Protection Cluster said as of September, more than 15,900 unaccompanied and separated children live in IDP and host communities in Tigray Region. More than 10,000 girls and boys require urgent alternative care arrangements, family tracing, and reunification. The government worked in collaboration with various organizations in rehabilitating needy children.

Institutionalized Children: There were an estimated 4.5 million orphans in the country in 2012, which comprised 4.9 percent of the population, according to UNICEF. The vast majority lived with extended family members. Governmental and privately operated orphanages were overcrowded, and conditions were often

unsanitary. Many institutionalized children reportedly did not receive adequate health care.

Antisemitism

The Jewish community numbered approximately 2,000 persons. There were no reports of antisemitic acts, and the Addis Ababa Jewish community reported it believed it was protected by the government to practice its faith; however, it did face limited societal discrimination.

Trafficking in Persons

See the Department of State's *Trafficking in Persons Report* at <https://www.state.gov/trafficking-in-persons-report/>.

Acts of Violence, Criminalization, and Other Abuses Based on Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity or Expression, or Sex Characteristics

Criminalization: Consensual same-sex sexual conduct is illegal, and conviction is punishable by three to 15 years' imprisonment. There were no reports of persons incarcerated or prosecuted for engaging in consensual same-sex sexual conduct.

Violence against LGBTQI+ Individuals: There were reports of violence against LGBTQI+ persons; reporting was limited due to fear of retribution, discrimination, or stigmatization. There are no hate crime laws or other criminal justice mechanisms to aid in the investigation of abuses against LGBTQI+ persons. Individuals generally did not publicly identify themselves as LGBTQI+ due to severe societal stigma and the illegality of consensual same-sex sexual conduct. Activists in the LGBTQI+ community reported surveillance and feared for their safety.

Discrimination: No law prohibits discrimination by state or nonstate actors

against LGBTQI+ persons. LGBTQI+ individuals face high levels of societal discrimination nationwide, including in education and employment. They risk physical violence and ostracism if their sexual orientation is revealed. The social stigma and criminalization of same-sex sexual conduct makes it difficult for LGBTQI+ persons to be open about their sexual orientation. Instances of harassment or violence against LGBTQI+ persons were rarely reported.

Availability of Legal Gender Recognition: The country does not permit legal gender recognition. There is no mechanism for individuals to change gender identity markers on legal and identifying documents to bring them into alignment with their gender identity.

Involuntary or Coercive Medical or Psychological Practices Specifically Targeting LGBTQI+ Individuals: LGBTQI+ persons face high levels of societal discrimination, dissuading them from publicly revealing their identity even to close family or friends. There were no explicit reports of so-called conversion therapy, although there were anecdotal reports of punitive measures against LGBTQI+ individuals to “change” a person’s sexual orientation or gender identity or expression.

Restrictions of Freedom of Expression, Association, or Peaceful Assembly: The LGBTQI+ community in the country remained entirely underground due to risks of harassment and physical violence. Given the sensitivities, local NGOs did not advocate for LGBTQI+ rights, nor was there any public discussion of LGBTQI+ rights.

Persons with Disabilities

Many persons with disabilities could not access education, health services, public buildings, and transportation on an equal basis with others. The constitution does not mandate equal rights for persons with disabilities. Employment law prohibits discrimination against persons with physical and mental disabilities but does not explicitly mention intellectual or sensory disabilities. It is illegal for deaf persons

to drive; despite the law, in April the government launched a program for the training and issuance of driver's license for deaf persons. There were reports that the government allegedly denied antenatal and postnatal care services, as well as vaccination, for children with disabilities.

Property owners are required to give persons with disabilities preference for ground-floor apartments, and they generally did so.

Women with disabilities faced more disadvantages in access to education and employment. According to the *2010 Young Adult Survey* by the Population Council, 23 percent of girls with disabilities were in school, compared with 48 percent of girls and 55 percent of boys without disabilities.

Nationally there were several schools for persons with hearing and vision disabilities and several training centers for children and young persons with intellectual disabilities. There was a network of prosthetic and orthopedic centers in five of the 10 regions.

The law does not restrict the right of persons with disabilities to vote and otherwise participate in civic affairs, although accessibility problems made participation difficult for some persons with more significant disabilities. Older persons, pregnant women, and nursing mothers received priority when voting. The FEAPD preliminary report on its observation of the June elections noted accessibility for persons with disabilities was hindered and that persons with disabilities required additional assistance to access 22 percent of the polling stations visited by observers (see also section 3, Participation of Women and Members of Minority Groups).

On August 8, the Ethiopian Lawyers with Disabilities Association reported an increase in violation of rights of persons with disabilities and blamed the government for failing to hold officials accountable for the breach of the rights. The association demanded the government allocate a separate budget to protect the rights of persons with disabilities.

Other Societal Violence or Discrimination

Sporadic but deadly clashes occurred in the border area between Afar and Somali Regions, and between Oromia and Somali Regions.

On August 18, the Somali regional government requested assistance for thousands of displaced persons after renewed clashes in areas bordering Somali and Afar Regions in mid-August.

On July 18, local media reported clashes on the border of Somali and Oromia Regions, displacing thousands of civilians from an entire village where villagers said at least 20 persons had died of hunger following a large displacement. On August 4, as the communal clashes intensified, 8,759 civilians were reportedly displaced in the border area of Somali and Oromia Regions.

Societal stigma and discrimination against persons with HIV and AIDS continued in education, employment, and community integration. Persons with HIV and AIDS reported difficulty accessing various services. There were no statistics on the scale of the problem.

Section 7. Worker Rights

a. Freedom of Association and the Right to Collective Bargaining

The constitution and law provide workers, except for civil servants and certain categories of workers primarily in the public sector, with the right to form and join unions, conduct legal strikes, and bargain collectively. Other provisions and laws, however, severely restrict these rights. The law specifically prohibits managerial employees, teachers, health-care workers, judges, prosecutors, security-service workers, domestic workers, and seasonal agricultural workers from organizing unions. The law prohibits antiunion discrimination and requires employers found guilty of antiunion discrimination to reinstate workers dismissed for union activities.

A minimum of 10 workers are required to form a union. While the law provides all unions with the right to register, the government may refuse to register trade unions that do not meet its registration requirements. The law allows for refusing registration for a union when union leaders are restricted from certain civil rights by court and when the union is not willing to replace them. There were no reports of a registration refused on this basis. The government may unilaterally cancel the registration of a union. Workers may not join more than one trade union per employment. The law stipulates a trade union organization may not act in an overtly political manner.

The law allows administrative authorities to seek recourse via court actions to cancel union registration for engaging in prohibited activities, such as political action.

While the law recognizes the right to collective bargaining, this right was severely restricted under the law. Negotiations aimed at amending or replacing a collectively bargained agreement must take place within three months of its expiration; otherwise, the prior provisions on wages and other benefits cease to apply. The law restricts enterprise unions to negotiating wages only at the plant level. Civil servants, including public-school teachers, have the right to establish and join professional associations created by the employees but may not bargain collectively. Arbitration procedures in the public sector are more restrictive than in the private sector. Penalties for violations were not commensurate with those for comparable crimes.

Although the constitution and law provide workers with the right to strike to protect their interests, the law contains detailed provisions prescribing extremely complex and time-consuming formalities that make legal strike actions prohibitively difficult. The law requires aggrieved workers to attempt to reconcile with employers before striking; it also includes a lengthy dispute settlement process. These provisions apply equally to an employer's right to lock workers out. For a strike to be authorized, two-thirds of the workers must support such

action. If not referred to a court or labor relations board, the union retains the right to strike without resorting to either of these options, provided they give at least 10 days' notice to the other party and the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs and make efforts at reconciliation.

The law also prohibits strikes by workers who provide essential services, including air transport and urban bus services, electric-power suppliers, gasoline station personnel, hospital and pharmacy personnel, firefighters, telecommunications personnel, and urban sanitary workers. The list of essential services goes beyond the International Labor Organization (ILO) definition of essential services. The law prohibits retribution against strikers, but it also provides for civil or criminal penalties against unions and workers convicted of committing unauthorized strike actions. If the provisions of the penal code prescribe more severe penalties, the punishment for conviction codified in the penal code becomes applicable. Any public servant who goes on strike, who urges others to go on strike, or who fails to carry out his or her duties in a proper manner, to the prejudice of state, public, or private interest, is subject to imprisonment that involves forced labor.

Trade unions expanded their membership in special economic-zone industrial parks and successfully advocated for enforcement against antiunion discrimination and retaliation against workers attempting to organize and assert labor rights. Union-busting practices remain widespread among employers. The informal labor sector, including domestic workers and seasonal agricultural workers, was not unionized or protected by labor law. The law defines workers as persons in an employment relationship. Lack of adequate staffing prevented the government from effectively enforcing applicable laws for those sectors protected by law. Court procedures were often subject to lengthy delays and appeals.

Lawsuits alleging unlawful dismissal often took years to resolve because of case backlogs in the courts. Labor officials reported that high unemployment, fear of retribution, and long delays in hearing labor cases deterred workers from participating in strikes and other labor actions. Two-thirds of union members

belonged to the Confederation of Ethiopian Trade Unions. Labor-sector stakeholders reported that the confederation demonstrated increasing independence from the government.

b. Prohibition of Forced or Compulsory Labor

The law prohibits and criminalizes all forms of forced or compulsory labor but permits courts to order forced labor as a punitive measure. The government did not effectively enforce the law, and forced labor reportedly occurred.

The law prescribes harsh penalties for conviction of human trafficking and exploitation crimes, including slavery, forced labor, debt bondage, sex trafficking, and servitude. Police at the federal and regional levels received training focused on human trafficking and exploitation.

Some businesspersons allegedly exploited boys in forced labor in traditional weaving, construction, agriculture, and street vending; traffickers also exploited women and children in domestic servitude. Labor recruiters frequently targeted young persons from the country's rural areas with false promises of a better life; increasingly, traffickers were replicating legitimate app-based recruitment tools to illegally recruit vulnerable populations and exploit them in forced labor.

The government sometimes deployed prisoners to work outside the prisons for private businesses, a practice the ILO stated could constitute compulsory labor. The ILO also expressed concern regarding penal sanctions involving compulsory labor as a punishment for the expression of political or ideological views, noting the government's use of excessive and disproportionate force to disperse protests; the arbitrary arrest and detention of protestors, opposition party members, and human rights defenders; and restrictions on movement, assembly, media access, internet services, and arbitrary arrest and detention of many individuals following the state of emergency declaration.

Also see the Department of State's *Trafficking in Persons Report* at

<https://www.state.gov/trafficking-in-persons-report/>.

c. Prohibition of Child Labor and Minimum Age for Employment

See the Department of Labor's *Findings on the Worst Forms of Child Labor* at <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/ilab/resources/reports/child-labor/findings>.

d. Discrimination with Respect to Employment and Occupation

The law prohibits discrimination based on race, ethnicity, national origin, nationality, gender, marital status, religion, political affiliation, political outlook, pregnancy, socioeconomic status, disability, or “any other conditions.” The law prohibits discrimination in respect of employment and occupations. Authorities, however, enforced these rights unevenly. The law specifically recognizes the additional burden on pregnant women and persons with disabilities. The penalty for conviction of discrimination on any of the above grounds was not commensurate with those for comparable offenses. The government reportedly took limited measures to enforce the law. Sexual orientation, gender identity, and HIV-positive status have no basis for protection under the law.

There were legal restrictions on women's employment, including limitations on occupations deemed dangerous and in industries such as mining and agriculture. Women had fewer employment opportunities than men. Although the constitution provides the right of women workers to equal pay for comparable work, the Central Statistical Agency reported that women earn only around 63 percent of salary earned by men in similar work. Discrimination in employment and occupation reportedly occurred based on sexual orientation and gender identity.

The law gives refugees and asylum seekers the opportunity to work on a development project supported by the international community that economically benefits both refugees and citizens or to earn wages through self-employment.

e. Acceptable Conditions of Work

Wage and Hour Laws: There is no national minimum wage, but the Ministry of Labor and Skills made progress toward establishing a national minimum wage with the support of the ILO by forming a minimum wage board. The minimum wage board includes representatives from the government, employees and trade unions, and other stakeholders. Some government institutions and public enterprises set their own minimum wages. Public-sector employees, the largest group of wage earners, earned a monthly minimum wage that was above the poverty line. Workers in the country's industrial parks earned wages below the poverty line.

The law provides for a 48-hour maximum legal workweek with a 24-hour rest period, premium pay for overtime, and prohibition of excessive compulsory overtime. Four conditions allow employers to make use of overtime work: urgency of the task, danger, absence of an employee, and lack of alternatives. Additionally, employers may not engage their employees in overtime work exceeding two hours a day, 20 hours a month, and 100 hours a year. The law entitles employees in public enterprises and government financial institutions to overtime pay; civil servants receive compensatory time off for overtime work. Most employees in the formal sector worked a 39-hour workweek, but only a small percentage of the population, concentrated in urban areas, was involved in wage-labor employment.

Occupational Safety and Health: The government, industries, and unions negotiated occupational safety and health (OSH) standards, which do not fully address worker safety in many industries. Many workers specifically excluded by law from unionizing, including domestic workers and seasonal agricultural workers, reportedly did not benefit from health and safety regulations in the workplace. The ministry lacked detailed, sector-specific health and safety guidelines.

Hazardous working conditions existed in the agricultural sector, which was the

primary base of the country's economy. There were also reports of hazardous and exploitative working conditions in the construction and industrial sectors, although data on deaths and injuries were not available.

Wage, Hour, and OSH Enforcement: Overall, the government did not effectively enforce wage laws. Penalties were not commensurate with those for comparable violations of similar laws. The Labor Ministry's inspection department was responsible for enforcement of workplace standards. OSH measures were not effectively enforced. The ministry carried out some regular labor inspections to monitor compliance, but the government had an inadequate number of labor inspectors to enforce the law and did not effectively record or track violations.

Informal Sector: The World Bank and the *National Employment Policy and Strategy of Ethiopia* reported that the informal sector included more than 70 percent of urban workers. Worker activities in the country's informal sector included small-scale manufacturing of food products, cotton textiles, wood and carpentry products, leather products, chemical and plastic products, nonmetal products, structural stone goods and bangles; commerce such as trade in eggs and milk products, retail fruit and vegetable sales, haircutting, domestic services, laundry, auto repair and maintenance, work in hotels and restaurants; mining; quarrying; transport including taxis and rickshaw pulling; construction; and agriculture. Some formal-sector companies produced goods with inputs from home-based producers in the informal sector like traditional weaving, shoemaking, tailoring, pottery, carpets, maintenance and repair, and local beverage making. Wages in the informal sector generally were below subsistence levels.

Compensation, benefits, and working conditions of seasonal agricultural workers were far below those of unionized permanent agricultural employees. Although labor laws covered informal sector and part time workers who had employment contracts, the government did little to enforce the law. Most informal and part-time workers had no employment contracts. Many foreign, migrant, and informal

laborers reportedly worked more than 48 hours per week. Government programs such as the Productive Social Safety Net provide some social protections for informal workers with extremely low income.